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# Modern Philology

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## THE FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS IN HERDER'S THOUGHT. III

### Chap. II

#### EXTENSION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF PERSONALITY

The essence of personality is spontaneity, conceived by Herder as an individual force, which is the "true and real source" in the Leibnitzian definition, or the "first cause," of action. His principle of personality is thus a synthetic unity involving the two abstract elements of individuality and spontaneity. In the interpretation and application of this principle it is of the first importance to bear in mind Herder's fundamental axiom, which was seen exemplified in the eleventh chapter of his first *Wäldchen*,<sup>1</sup> and which dominates the entire order of his thought, to wit, that concrete individualities are the primary facts of reality and that generalizations are derivative.

He did not limit the principle of personality, as was the custom of eighteenth-century ideology, to an abstract, absolute atomic unit called man, but endeavored to trace it in every important, concrete relation which an unequaled gift of specific discernment revealed to him. All of which comes to this, that he was the first to realize and fully set forth the fundamental truth that the essence

<sup>1</sup> See p. 298 of chap. i of this essay, *Modern Philology*, XVIII (October, 1920).

of personality can be found, not in any abstract conception of individuality, but only in a synthetic unity (which one might liken to the molecular entities of physics) of characteristic traits. The eighteenth-century atomism really destroyed the substance of individuality by eliminating the characteristic part of each concrete form of personality. It was Herder, in transforming Leibnitz' too abstract conception of the monad, who attained to the idea on which rests the fundamental belief of modern humanism, and which is its only fortress against the forces of regimentation which are growing ever stronger in the present age—the belief that every concrete individual is essentially different from every other and can never be replaced.

In Herder's view, the synthetic principle of personality as individuated spontaneity is primary but not absolute; it is universal, yet infinitely differentiated; it is an integral part of the general physical, physiological, biological, in short, the entire mechanical, organism of nature and yet embodies a wholly spontaneous, autonomous, and responsible force. The one problem at the roots of all his ideas was, therefore, to trace the empirical forms of personality in all their chief relations and to define the spontaneous part of each of these forms as the characteristic residue which could in no manner, except by overgeneralization and indiscriminate assumption, be reduced to the terms of mechanical science or rationalistic objective abstraction. He has thereby fixed the problem of personality in philosophy as well as in science. Neither philosophers nor biologists have to this day been able to add material clarification to the problem of the primary relations between the principles of spontaneity and physical mechanism. There is no scientific or philosophical proof that spontaneity may or may not be an integral part of the mechanism of nature, and vice versa.

The relations which Herder indefatigably pursued throughout his enormous intellectual activity, form three main groups, namely: the relation of collective extension, involving particularly the conceptions of *Volk* and *Humanität*; the physiological relation of physical growth, organization, and function; and that of ultimate identity or idealization, the metaphysical relation, which culminates in the conception of God.

Herder's gift of specific discernment and virile sense of relevance in the interpretation of each concrete detail of these varying relations is unsurpassed. His fundamental problems are substantially the problems of present humanism. And with his extraordinary power of imagination and criticism he combined a tireless energy and an indefatigable zeal which have made him both the most philosophic and the most inspiring critic. Many of the details of his information are now obsolete, much of his history is wrong, many of his scientific hypotheses are now merely rudimentary guesses, as all concrete facts of information become either commonplace or false in the course of time, yet his methods of analysis, his standards of relevance and specific bearing, his genius for seizing upon the crucial part of the expressions of personality remain substantially unassailable. He has revealed the principal factors of individual spontaneity in its characteristic activities, and laid down, once for all, the essential forms of combination and the criteria of these entities. Thus he is, to a far higher degree and, above all, to a much more specific and definitive effect than the present age realizes, the father of modern humanism.

The subject of the present chapter is the collective relation of Herder's principle of personality. Discussion of the other two relations will follow next.

#### "VOLK" AND "HUMANITÄT"

Herder's greatest critical competence and principal imaginative interests lay in the field of literature. Regarding, as he did, language as the chief associative function of the mind, and literature as the "discourse of perfect sensibility," i.e., the discourse in which the activities of all the senses attained fullest unity, he could not but judge representative literature the truest and most characteristic expression and record of the spirit of man. His first task was, obviously, to discover the criteria of representativeness in literature. He proceeded by analysis and comparison of those works of literature known to his age which were generally accepted as the greatest. His aim was thus inductively to ascertain both the principal qualities characteristic of each ethnic, which roughly coincided with each linguistic, group, and those common to all these groups. The

former would furnish the character of each ethnic personality, the latter, what might be considered as the essential character of humanity.

Herder's conception of spontaneity as the integral expression of all the powers of personality associated him historically with the general romantic naturalism of his age, which culminated in Rousseau's identification of spontaneity with nature, and later degenerated into the extreme Romantic animistic dream of a sensational-emotional monism, in which spontaneity, while verbally raised to infinite power, was actually reduced to a purely passive function of the physiological mechanism of temperament in the guise of an individual gesture of an absolute animistic fate.<sup>1</sup> Misled by the superficial resemblance between Herder's and Rousseau's uses of spontaneity and nature, critical opinion has generally acquiesced in the assumption that Herder was really the founder of German Romanticism, whereas in reality even when Goethe leaned strongly toward Romanticism and Schiller wavered, at the time of his aesthetic poems, Herder throughout maintained his uncompromising opposition to the arbitrary subjectivity essential to the Romantic mind. By this false generalization, attention is diverted from the most important fact that Herder was the first aesthetic theorist since Aristotle to assert and establish with surpassing acumen and variety of exemplification the dependence of any theory of poetry and art on the creative processes and therewith the necessity of directing aesthetic inquiry inductively toward these processes rather than toward absolute generalizations, whether in the impersonal terms of Rationalism or in the subjective terms of Romanticism. Herder stood apart from both these one-sided movements. He aimed at the fundamental subjectivity, which is the source of all poetry and art, but he pursued his aim by the impersonal methods of induction.

Herder, while he differed with Aristotle in most of his particular conclusions, yet was in essential agreement with the methods of the founder of inductive logic, a circumstance which alone suffices to dispose of the view which groups him with the Romanticists.

<sup>1</sup> See for this characteristic Romantic corruption of the idea of spontaneity my paper, "Studies in the Mind of Romanticism," *Modern Philology* (German Section), XVI (February, 1919), 123 ff., 130, 131; XVII (June, 1919), 32 ff.

He was the first modern critic and poet to collect the best and most representative poetical productions of all the peoples to which he had access. This, the first international thesaurus, he translated with great skill and fidelity, and analyzed with the discriminating sympathy and the enthusiasm, both disinterested and purposeful, which distinguishes the great humanist. He hoped thus, by precept and example, to awaken the genius of his own people, and with it that of all the others, to a new springtide of creative idealism.

His conception of the natural man is not, as the Romantic conception, an a priori, absolute postulate but a generalization based on a comprehensive and finely discriminating examination of all the evidence available, and, therefore, conditioned by concrete reality. Natural man, according to him, is a generalization derived from comparison of the collective personalities of the existing ethnic groups as embodied in their representative literatures.

If, now, folk personality is the primary creator of poetry, then it must, in accordance with his and Aristotle's principles of aesthetic induction, be also the ultimate judge of it. In other words, only that part of a people's poetry is properly representative of it, is properly informed with its essential collective personality, which has been approved and permanently accepted by its collective judgment. In Herder's term, all "folk literature" must be "literature of the people." It must be *volksmässig*. Herder originated the term *Volkslitteratur* or *Volkspoesie* in its modern meaning. He alternated the terms frequently with *Litteratur* or *Poesie des Volks*, emphasizing now the originative, now the appropriative, relation.

It is in this test of *Volksmässigkeit*, agreement with folk character, that difficulties enter, which, though they complicate some of the detailed applications of the term *Volk*, are yet readily analyzed and interpreted as consistent aspects and functions of collective personality.<sup>1</sup>

The term *Volk*, "folk," has at all times been subject to much vagueness and contradictoriness of usage. Most of this confusion

<sup>1</sup> This question is fully discussed by Dr. Georgiana Simpson, one of my students, in her dissertation on *Herder's Conception of "Das Volk,"* which is soon to be published. The subject of the present paper, which is the collective aspect of Herder's theory of personality, involves only the essential criteria of folk personality which determine his conclusions.

can be removed by the observation that the difficulty is not so much one of definition as one of valuation. That is, actually *Volk* is to almost everyone a generalization of the less sophisticated part of an ethnic or political group who work for their living and are distinguished by the qualities of mind and character associated with a more or less simple, wholesome, laborious, responsible, sober, and unstrained mode of life. But as to the valuation of this collective type, two sharply antagonistic points of view have alternately been dominant throughout history. It was especially the age of Pope and Dryden, of Louis XIV and Boileau, and following Boileau's example, that of Opitz and Gottsched in Germany, which regarded the folk and its creative, especially its literary, products, with contempt and derision, as lacking in refinement, learning, mastery of diction, and subtleness and elevation of thought. This aristocratic attitude toward folk literature is characteristic of the Rationalistic movement.

The Romantic movement of the eighteenth century, on the other hand, especially since its culmination in Rousseau's doctrine of the natural man as the embodiment of perfect spontaneity as proceeding directly from the hand of the Creator, tended to idealize the people as the highest embodiment of man, as the union of the true children of God.

In the clash of these two valuations appeared most of the characteristics of the two movements, the Rationalistic and the Romantic. Herder was offended by the one-sidedness of the one as much as of the other. He was bitterly opposed to the aristocratic sterility of Rationalism, but he was no less intolerant of the subjective narrowness of Romanticism. He finished by combining what was best in both, into his profound and rich synthesis, which formed the foundations of what for several generations was, and may again become, the motive of a new era of humanity.

Spontaneity was his touchstone. Only those types of character, the spontaneity of which is not corrupted or weakened by false refinements, conventions, or habits, or, on the other hand, by mob brutality, and only those types of mind, the spontaneity of which is not impoverished and crippled by false intellectualism or the egocentric emotionalism of Romanticism, or deadened by stupidity, ignorance, and mob hypnotism, are to him truly representative of

the people. This conclusion was not, like the assumption of Rationalism and Rousseau, arbitrary and a priori, but it was derived and substantiated by his inductive analysis of the body of literature which he accepted as the literature of the people.

Now we see the deeper relation between Herder's conceptions of personality and of *Volk*, of spontaneity and *Volksmässigkeit*. They are merely different terms for the same quality as it appears in *Volksliteratur*. They are the characteristic aspects of the highest degree of harmony between the personality of the individual author, his subject, and the collective personality of his native audience or ethnic environment.

Herder concludes that all poetry, no matter under what circumstances or by what agents it is produced, which embodies this inner identity, is the true folk poetry. Folk poetry, therefore, is to him the highest type and the final standard of all poetry.

The test of folk poetry, in Herder's conception, is not that of origin nor of form alone nor of content nor of intense subjectivity of feeling or objective truth of idea, but of fullest, most complete and spontaneous, and most cherished embodiment of a people's soul in accordance with its own permanent historical judgment. Folk literature is the standard utterance of a people. He says:

. . . . It remains eternally true that that part of literature which refers to the people must be *volksmässig*, or it is mere classical air bubble. It remains also eternally true that unless we have a *Volk*, we lack also a public, a nation, a language and a literature that are ours and live and work in us. Unless our whole life is founded on the *Volk* we write eternally for desk students and tiresome critics, out of whose mouths and stomachs we receive back what we have put into them; we make romances, odes, heroic epics, church and kitchen songs, which no one understands, no one desires, no one feels. Our classical literature is a bird of paradise, so gaily colored, so pretty, all flight, all elevation, but never with a foot on the German earth.<sup>1</sup>

He applies the same test to the folk drama. In *Shakespeare* he says: "The form [of a 'living drama'] is of secondary importance. A *Fastnachtspiel* or a marionette play may be true drama if it attains a *dramatic end with the people*."

All works of literature, no matter when, where, by whom, or under what circumstances they have been produced or taken their

<sup>1</sup> *Über die Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst.*



final forms, provided they are accepted by the *Volk*, are to him folk literature. He sharply distinguishes ethnic personality from that of the crowd. True folk creations and judgments have depth and permanence and are above mere vulgar and temporary popularity. "People," he says, "does not mean the rabble of the alley, which never sings and creates, but roars and mutilates."<sup>1</sup> In full consistency Herder includes in the class of *Volkspoesie*, the Song of Songs, Genesis, the Book of Job, the Old Testament, generally; Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Sappho, and other classical Greek poets, including those of the *Greek Anthology*; Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare ("who built on the faith of the people and from it took their materials and creations"),<sup>2</sup> *Percy's Reliques*, songs from the Elizabethan dramatists generally; *Parzival*, *Melusine*, *Magellone*, *Artus*, *The Knights of the Round Table*, the *Legend of Roland* in their German versions as well as in their Romanic exemplars; the German *Heldenbuch*; MacPherson's *Ossian*, which he in common with his contemporaries regarded literally as ancient Celtic poetry; the *Eddas*, the Scaldic poetry, which was at his time considered primitive poetry; Minnesong; Bürger's poetry, Klopstock's at its best; church hymns, also, the "universal legends, fairy tales, and mythologies of the peoples"<sup>3</sup>—in short, all dramatic and lyrical poetry and all the various metrical and non-metrical forms of narrative adopted by the usage of a people into the common treasure of its language.

His principal conclusions, which form a homogeneous whole, are summed up in a highly synthetic arrangement in three essays, entitled: *Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über die Lieder alter Völker*, 1773; *Shakespeare*, 1773; and *Über die Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst*, 1777, in which latter he assembled the ideas written down since 1773 and originally intended as an introduction to his collection of *Volkslieder*, published in two parts in the following two years.<sup>4</sup> The subject of the first and third is

<sup>1</sup> "Volk heisst nicht der Pöbel auf den Gassen. Der singt und dichtet niemals sondern schreit und verstümmelt."

<sup>2</sup> *Über die Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst*, . . . "auf dem Glauben des Volkes bauten, daher schufen und daher nahmen."

<sup>3</sup> . . . die allgemeinen Volkssagen, Märchen und Mythologien."

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately afflicted by a later editor with its present redundant and sentimental title, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*.

folk poetry, including both the lyrical and the narrative forms; that of the second, folk drama. For the particular substantiation and further development of these conclusions we have to examine a number of other works, part of which had preceded those cited, and were therefore presumed by him to be known to his readers. Further extensions of his theory of personality in folk poetry appear especially in—*Über den Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, in the *Ideen*, in his essays on the epigram and the fable, and in many of his later collections of papers, especially the *Humanitätsbriefe* and the *Zerstreute Blätter*. The subject, being basic to his view of life, occurs in one aspect or another, but essentially unchanged, in all his serious work.

Herder's critical method, simple in principle but infinitely varied and flexible in application, is inherent in his theory of personality. He applies the test of individual integrity, not only to the matter of literary discourse, but to every part of form, from the general principles of structure and diction to every detail of technique. All form is secondary to the specific individuality which it invests and to which it holds an integral, organic relation analogous to that of the shape of a tree with respect to its nature. All fixed, external standards and rules of form are rejected. With this inevitable conclusion, the antagonism between his and the pseudo-classical or rationalistic theory of aesthetic becomes irreconcilable.

Some characteristic applications of the relativity, which he attributed to all parts of the genuine manifestations of personality, appear in the following conclusions: If an individual spirit, forming and appropriating a true expression, is rugged or savage, the form must be likewise; if simple and downright, so must be the utterance; if complex, like the "natures" of the personalities of the Shakespearean age, the form must be analogous; and so forth.

Herder thus is the first to carry the principle of individualization to its proper conclusions. He stands in direct opposition to the formal principles of Rationalism, which were the necessary consequences of the rationalistic philosophy; the crucial shortcoming of which is the falsely objective overgeneralization exposed in the first *Wäldchen*. This misplaced objectivity is the product of the absence, or at best of a merely accidental and rudimentary development, of the sense for specific individuality. This lack commits

Rationalism to a commonplace and false absolutism and precludes the organic criteria of spontaneity and integral form.

Herder's literary theory is a theory of organic relativity. It cannot be doubted that such a conception, provided it avoid the false simplicity and purely subjective conception of integrity pertaining to Romanticism, that is, provided it include, as in Herder's investigations it did, all the proper factors, both objective and subjective, is the ideal of a true interpretation of *Geistesgeschichte*, of the history of the characteristic manifestations of the human mind, which is the essence of humanism. For it is, as Herder never tires of asserting, in this creative method, that the production and the interpretation of folk literature in the highest sense, are identical.

This creative and critical identity of the personalities of author and audience is in Herder's view the specific character of classicity. This classicity Herder identified with "nature."

It follows that classic literature is identical with folk literature. Classic literature is, therefore, not produced by imitation of the masterpieces of other ages, nations, classes, and individuals. The doctrines of the pseudo-classicists, like Boileau and Batteux and their followers in France, and Gottsched in Germany, can lead only to sterile perversions of the classics of past times but not to the creations of classics for a living age. Thus it was Herder who formulated the fundamental issues of the modern conflict concerning literary form.

Before proceeding farther, it is well to sum up the characteristic results of Herder's view of folk literature so far presented. His identification of folk literature with the classic or standard, i.e., the representative and best part of the literature of a people, and also with "nature," involves an idealization, i.e., a selection determined by a judgment of value. It also implies that the collective personality embodied in folk literature is the highest form of personality. We are here confronted with a very profound and interesting problem. It is impossible to dispose of it by the simple expedient of assuming, as is generally done, that Herder's final basis of judgment is aesthetic. For that term itself is not as simple as it appears to the rationalistic mind. Herder's conclusion of the integral union of all matters of literary and artistic substance and form with indi-

vidual personality has removed aesthetics from its position of independence and isolation and made it an organic part of the entire problem of personality.

The idealization involved in Herder's results is therefore not of a purely formal character nor determined by a subjective choice, such as is supposed to be characteristic of a purely "aesthetic" judgment, but it is the verdict of the totality of one's judgment of the highest values of life itself. Herder's conclusions compel a fundamental synthesis of ultimate ethical with purely formal values, conditioned not by arbitrary subjective preference but by all the concrete facts of reality or the laws of nature. In other words, this idealization is itself the result of the same method and the same comprehensive reach of induction which are characteristic of Herder's other inquiries. They too are inherent in his primary principle of personality.

His argument throws an interesting light upon the final break between Herder and Goethe in the early nineties, which was caused by the incompatibility of the purely formal interpretation of aesthetics developed by Schiller, who was then in the ascendent with Goethe, with the deeper and richer view of Herder, shared by Goethe in previous years and now misinterpreted as one-sidedly and odiously moralistic.<sup>1</sup>

Herder's identification of the individual peoples on the one hand, and of all humanity on the other, with nature, produces an apparent vagueness in the meaning of the latter. This vagueness, for which he has been much criticized, exists, however, only if we, as his critics do, assume in accordance with technical rationalistic philosophy the primacy of the general term, that is, in this case, if we suppose that an assumption of a general "nature" is the standard for all humanity and therefore for each "natural" individual. The matter becomes clear, however, if we bear in mind the essential principle in Herder's order of thought, which is inherent in his inductive method, to wit, that the more general is secondary to the more concrete conception, and therefore not absolute but relative. Herder attributed authenticity only to the conclusions substantiated by concrete reality and within the limits covered by the latter. He followed the scientific

<sup>1</sup> This break will form the subject of the penultimate chapter of this series.

method of induction which was first laid down in Bacon's *Novum Organum* and is now the indisputed pride of modern science, from which it gains almost daily confirmation.<sup>1</sup>

By applying this principle of Herder's thought we reach the conclusion that Herder's conceptions of the particular "natures" of the different peoples are derived from and conditioned by the extent of his induction from all the available manifestations of their collective personalities. His general conception of the nature of man, his "natural" man, is no more than a generalization composed of those characters common to all the individual folk personalities known to him. It is no absolute or primary conception but limited by the evidence from which it is derived.

From his examination of folk poetry Herder concludes that the discourse of the people in its purity is distinguished by ingenuous sureness of expression, concreteness of vision, immediacy of contact with reality, authenticity of perception, incorrupt originality of thought, disinterestedness, avoidance of intellectual sophistications, such as symbolical or allegorical "verbal meanings," faultless and naïve discernment of essentials, directness of attention and concentration, unfailing mastery of the substantive term, unpremeditated firmness, and force of expression.

These qualities determine both substance and form of folk discourse, down to every part of structure and diction, and detail of technique. Form is subordinate to it. Independent principles of form are alien and false.

The personality embodied in this poetry, the ideal folk man, is distinguished then by a perfect organic co-ordination of all his powers. He thinks and acts immediately, without need of deliberation, conscious analysis, abstraction, mental division, and recombination, in short, of all the processes of ratiocination. He has perfect integrity of consciousness, acting totally and instinctively. Whatever he does, he does, in Hamann's phrase, "with his entire heart and his entire soul."

The antithesis of this ideal of personality is the "modern" man of a later age. The epigone has lost the integrity of his ancestors. He has eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The

<sup>1</sup> See for the first assertion of this principle, his first *Wäldchen*, chap. xi; above, p. 113.

unity and harmony of primitive man has given way to division and dissension within him. He is confused, baffled, self-conscious, irresolute, uncertain amid his warring native powers. Shackled by the makeshifts of external rules, which have to take the place of the instinctive motions of his now disrupted integrity, sophisticated, entangled in artificialities, severed from his original source of both creation and unified judgment, sterile and finical, lost in the trivialities of formalism, ridiculous in his pedantry and scholastic conceit, driven forth from the Eden of complete being into the desert of Rationalism—there he stands amid the husks of his false learning and the patter of his shallow and irrelevant disquisitions.

It is obvious that this ideal of the true man with its rationalistic antithesis took its origin from Rousseau. But it receives a very different development. It is not, as with Rousseau, an absolute postulate, but a real induction from the whole of what Herder conceived as the literature of the people.<sup>1</sup>

The following quotations are from the most significant passages of his interpretations of folk poetry. It has seemed proper to make such substantial selection and rearrangement from the vast mass of Herder's writing, in order to exemplify his main applications of his fundamental theory of personality.

His method of presentation in these essays differs from the first *Wäldchen* and from some others, as, for instance, that on the origin of language, in its extremely synthetic arrangement, which without the clue offered by the theory of personality is likely to lead to misunderstanding and to give an impression of confusion. His mind, passionate and creative, gifted with an immense capacity for assimilating knowledge and with a very vivid and energetic power of specific discernment, together with an extraordinary vision embracing a multiplicity of interconnections between details superficially far apart—a vision that, as it were, continually hovered over the whole range of knowledge and legitimate inference; sensitive to every glint of analogy and quick in the pursuit of the specific suggestions borne by the latter; ceaselessly illumined by flashes of insight and surprised and delighted by new avenues of surmise and combination; sparkling with the ever varying play of secondary but interesting

<sup>1</sup> A critical discussion of this conception is deferred to the second part of this chapter.

detail, multitudinous as the ripples in a sunlit sea; prompted by an untiring and rich poetic imagination—a mind so abundant found a strictly analytic form of statement, in which each important idea could be expressed only once, too bald and rigid. He desired to assert the whole synthetic mass of his main ideas again and again in each group of its ever augmenting combinations and ever ramifying distinctions. He craved to hold in one inspired, simultaneous image, in one living and continuous focus of unity, the sum of his knowledge.

Herder's statements, at their best, are clear and beautiful, rich and pregnant, and convey a fuller and more varied conception of the endless interrelation of the ideas pertaining to the focus of his interpretation than an analytic statement could make. It must be said, however, that at other times they are vexatious, requiring some efforts of simplification. A number of misinterpretations of his work have arisen from a complexity of presentation, caused not by the exigencies of the synthetic order, but rather by inadequacy of means of expression and arrangement, an inadequacy which is the inevitable burden of every thinker who leaves the beaten track to find new paths. By far the greater number of misunderstandings are, however, the results of attempts, inherited from the rationalistic and especially the Kantian critics of Herder, to force his interpretations and generalizations into the very forms of thought which it was the primary motive and character of Herder's critical labor to challenge. The theory of personality is fundamentally incompatible with the objective absolutism of Rationalism, and any attempt to subject it to the standards of the latter involves a *petitio principii*, i.e., an assumption of the principle at issue. Rationalism, before applying its characteristic tests to Herder's principle, is obliged to justify anew its primary assumptions in so far as they are at variance with the crucial tests demanded by Herder's view.<sup>1</sup>

The blemishes adhering to Herder's mode of statement do not in themselves justify the common assumption, shared by both philosophical and literary critics of Herder, that his critical methods are confused. A synthetic, even a congested, form of statement is

<sup>1</sup> The logical issue raised by Herder's theory is the subject of the last chapter of this series.

not necessarily proof of lack or confusion of analysis in critical method. Even in his most complex statements, patient scrutiny will reveal the persistence of his leading ideas and a power of discrimination, which rarely commits, and almost never persists in, essential errors.

The following passages are indispensable for a comprehensive and adequate grasp both of the substance of Herder's views regarding folk poetry and of his characteristic methods of interpretation and exemplification.

He says in *Ossian*:

The spirit which actuates [the old songs] the rude simple, but great, magical, solemn manner, the depth of the impression made by each forceful word, the freedom of the projection [*der freie Wurf*], by which each impression is produced—all these characteristics of the ancients should not be considered in the light of curiosities or oddities but as Nature.<sup>1</sup>

And again:

You know from nature-descriptions how forcefully and firmly savages always express themselves. They always visualize concretely, clearly and vividly the things they wish to express; they are directly and precisely conscious of their purpose in speaking, not distracted by shadows of conceptions, half ideas or symbolical word meanings, nor corrupted by artificialities, slavish expectations, timid and sneaking politics and confusing meditations; blissfully ignorant of all these weaknesses of the mind, they grasp the *complete* thought and the *complete* word, simultaneously. They either are silent or speak in the moment of interest with unpremeditated firmness, sureness and beauty, which all educated Europeans have at all times been counseled to admire.<sup>2</sup>

All this has been lost by our modern "pedants."

Who would find among ourselves the remnants of this firmness, must not look for it among the pedants. Unspoiled children, women, people of good natural understanding, formed more through activity than speculation, these are, if I have properly described eloquence, the only and the best orators of our time. . . . In ancient times, it was the poets, skalds, scholars, who knew best how to join to this firmness and sureness, also dignity, euphony and beauty of expression, but since they thus closely united soul and tongue, instead of confusing, they supported and aided each other, and so produced those works of singers, bards, and minstrels, which are to us almost miracles.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ossian*, chap. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



Modern man has been miseducated till his knowledge has become "falsity, weakness and artificiality"; till we

make poems on subjects on which we do not know how to think, still less, how to meditate, and least of all, how to exercise our imagination; till we pretend to passions that we do not have and ape faculties [*Seelenkräfte*] that we do not possess.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . Homer, the greatest singer of the Greeks, was also their greatest folk poet. The whole of his glorious work is not *épopée*, but epos, fairy tale, legend, living folk tale. He did not sit down, on velvet, to write a heroic poem in twice twenty-four cantos, according to the rules of Aristotle, but sang what he had heard, portrayed what he had seen and vividly grasped.

The same is true of the compositions of Hesiod, Orpheus, of the choruses of Sophocles and Aeschylus, as much as of the "little ditties, table songs, and light airs" of the *Greek Anthology*. After some laudatory passages on folk poetry, he says in bitter irony:

But who would be such a barbarian that he should concern himself with the rude people, with the dregs of civilization, represented by fairy tales, prejudices, songs, rugged language? Why—he would be like an owl among the pretty, particolored, singing fowl, to defile our classical, syllable-counting literature.

Take one of the songs which occur in Shakespeare or in English collections of this [i.e., MacPherson's] sort and strip it of its lyrical forms, of euphony, rime, word order, the obscure progress of the melody [*des dunklen Ganges der Melodie*], so that you leave nothing except the meaning, translated in such or such a manner into one or another language—is it not as if you had tumbled the notes of a melody by Pergolese or the type of a print, in disarray over a page? . . . . How else does the poet receive the imprint of the inner emotion except through the impression of the external, the sense forms, in sound, tone, melody, shape, of all the obscure, unnamable things which flow in song as in a stream into our souls . . . .<sup>2</sup> the more wild, i.e., the more vivacious, the more spontaneous [*je lebendiger, je freiwirkender*] a people is, the more wild, i.e., the more vivid, free, concrete [*sinnlicher*], lyrical, active, must be . . . . its songs. The more remote a people is from artificial, scientific ways of thinking, language and literary manner, the less are its songs dead literary verses, made only for paper. The nature, the purpose, the whole wonder-working power by which folk songs become the delight, the inspiration, the impulse, the undying hereditary treasure of a people, depend on their lyrical character, the vivacious and, as it were, dancelike movement of the songs, on the living presence of the images,

<sup>1</sup> *Über die Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ossian*, chap. iv.

on the unity and as it were pressing abundance [*vom Zusammenhange und gleichsam Notdrange*] of the contents, the emotions, the symmetry of the words, the syllables, in many even of the letters, on the course of the melody and a hundred other things which come and go with the living word, with gnomic verse, and with national song. These are the arrows of this wild Apollo, with which he pierces hearts, and on which he fixes souls and memories. The longer a song is to endure, the stronger, the more concrete [*sinnlicher*] must be those soul awakeners, in order that they may defy the forces and the changes of time.

He asks in another passage,

Is it really true that such vivid breaks, abrupt transitions, and turns,<sup>1</sup> are to the soul of the people, which is chiefly concrete comprehension and imagination,<sup>2</sup> so outlandish and inconceivable as our learned men and connoisseurs are trying to make us believe?

On the contrary, they are characteristic of the people: "the more in the character of the people, the more vivid, the bolder, the more abrupt."<sup>3</sup>

We may add, in the spirit of Herder's comparison of folk poetry with that of the "learned," the "pedants," "the pretty, particolored singing fowl of our classical syllable-counting literature,"<sup>4</sup> that all vital and living literature is impatient of the minor connecting thoughts in a train of large ideas, and of the minor refinements of form in a great structure of art.

There are in Germany also, Herder continues, many virile poems in which speaks the spirit of the people. The young German poets should write in this spirit. He quotes, among many examples, "Haideröslein," adding a fine discussion of formal qualities, elisions, inversions, and other forms of the compactness, vividness, and reality characteristic of folk poetry.<sup>5</sup>

"The folksinger," he says farther on, "does not discourse, he paints with words and motions every circumstance and condition, for all are parts of the picture in his soul." "That cannot be taught; it is nature." "A vivid folk cannot express in song a general idea, an abstract truth, except in that bold, vivid, and concrete manner."

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. ix " . . . lebhafte Sprünge, Würfe, Wendungen."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, " . . . sinnlicher Verstand und Einbildung."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "je volksmässiger, je lebendiger; desto kühner, desto wirkender."

<sup>4</sup> P. 28 above.

<sup>5</sup> See Introduction to my edition of *Goethe's Poems* (Boston, Ginn & Co.), and notes to "Haideröslein," pp. xxviii, 187 ff.

Even the religious hymns that truly express the soul of a folk and so are folksong, share in this character. The Germans have many such, "but not any more so and more mighty than those composed by Luther."

Of all the forms of folk poetry Herder has attempted a definition only of song. He says:

I do not believe that it is a composition as a picture is a composition of pleasant colors; nor that the polish and external finish is its only and main distinction. The latter is characteristic of only one species of songs, which I would rather call cabinet or boudoir pieces, namely, sonnets, madrigals and the like; but it cannot be applied to song generally without qualifications and exceptions. The essence of song is singing, not picturing; its perfection lies in the melodic progress of passion or emotion, which one might name by the excellent ancient expression, air [*Weise*] . . . A song must be heard, not seen; heard with the ear of the soul, which does not count and measure and weigh separate syllables but desires the progress of the tune and floats on with it.

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[*To be concluded*]